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Thursday, 30 November 2000, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Holkeri ..... (Finland)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 122 (*continued*)

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations

The President: I should like to inform members that Mauritania has made the necessary payment to reduce its arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of this information?

It was so decided.

The President: This information will be reflected in an addendum to document A/55/345.

Agenda item 40

The situation in the Middle East

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/55/538, A/55/639)

Draft resolutions (A/55/L.49, A/55/L.50)

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Egypt to introduce draft resolutions A/55/L.49 and A/55/L.50.

Mr. Aboulgheit (Egypt) *(spoke in Arabic)*: I should like to introduce the two draft resolutions proposed under agenda item 40, A/55/L.49, entitled "Jerusalem", and A/55/L.50, entitled "The Syrian Golan".

Lebanon and Togo have joined in sponsoring draft resolution A/55/L.49.

The preambular part of draft resolution A/55/L.49 recalls the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly on the question of Jerusalem, all of which reaffirm that all the legislative and administrative measures taken by Israel with a view to changing or attempting to change the status of the city of Jerusalem are null and void and must be reversed. It also recalls Security Council 478 (1980), which reaffirms the unacceptability of the "basic law" declared by Israel. Draft resolution A/55/L.49 calls on all States with diplomatic missions in Jerusalem to withdraw them.

With regard to the procedural aspects of the draft resolution, the General Assembly notes, in paragraph 1, that Israel's decision to impose its laws and administrative procedures is illegal and, therefore, null and void. In paragraph 2, the General Assembly deplores the decision of some States to move their embassies to Jerusalem. The draft resolution also calls upon all States to abide by their commitments in accordance with the provisions of the relevant resolutions and of the Charter.

I am pleased to inform the General Assembly that Malaysia, Pakistan and Togo have joined in sponsoring draft resolution A/55/L.50, entitled "The Syrian Golan". The preambular part of the draft resolution recalls Security Council resolution 497 (1981) and

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reaffirms the principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, in accordance with the provisions of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. It also reaffirms the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 to the occupied Syrian Golan.

The draft resolution also expresses deep concern over Israel's failure to withdraw from the Syrian Golan, in contravention of the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, and again stresses the illegality of the Israeli settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan. The last preambular paragraph expresses grave concern over the halt in the peace process on the Syrian track, and the hope that peace talks will soon resume from the point where they left off.

On the procedural aspects, the General Assembly would declare in paragraph 1 that Israel has failed to comply with Security Council resolution 497 (1981) and in paragraph 2 that the Israeli decision of 1981 to impose its laws on the occupied Syrian Golan is null and void, and would call upon Israel to rescind it. The draft resolution also reaffirms the continued applicability of the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 to the Syrian territories occupied in 1967. It also determines that the continued occupation of Syrian territories constitutes a stumbling block in the way of achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

In addition, in paragraph 5 the draft resolution calls on Israel to resume the talks on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks and to respect the commitments and undertakings reached during the previous talks. Paragraph 7 calls upon all the parties concerned and the sponsors of the peace process to make the necessary efforts to resume the peace process and to ensure its success by implementing Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

In my statement before the General Assembly yesterday, I presented the basic elements of my country's position with regard to the question of Palestine and the Palestinian-Israeli negotiating track in the peace process. Today I would like to present the basic elements of the Egyptian position with regard to the situation in the Middle East in general.

While Egypt considers the question of Palestine to be the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the key to lasting peace in the Middle East, it also considers that achieving comprehensive peace in the region requires, as a basic condition, that Israel's use of the logic of peace should not be restricted to speech, but rather should be expressed through the actual implementation of the basic rules and principles agreed upon, foremost of which is the principle of land for peace. In this context, our view is that any settlement that could be reached between Israel and the Arab parties should be based on several equally important elements — namely, full Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories and the establishment of mutual and equitable security arrangements, then the establishment of normal relations between the Arab parties and Israel. Until such a formula containing all these important elements is reached, we would like to reassert the need for Israel to avoid taking any unilateral steps on the ground, in contravention of the provisions of international law and of United Nations resolutions, that may threaten the negotiations and void them of their meaning.

Arab participation in the 1991 Madrid Conference and in later stages of the negotiating process was based on Security Council resolution 242 (1967), as the major cornerstone of the peace process on all its tracks. In this regard, I would like to state that the peace that Egypt established with Israel more than 20 years ago was based on Security Council resolution 242 (1967) and hence on the principle of land for peace. It therefore set an essential precedent — I repeat, an essential precedent — for achieving a peaceful settlement between the Arab parties concerned and Israel. That in turn places a special responsibility on Egypt, compelling it to rely constantly on the foundations of peace that it established with Israel. These foundations are the following: first, full withdrawal from all territories occupied by force in 1967 by the Israeli armed forces; secondly, clearing these occupied territories of all Israeli settlements; thirdly, establishing mutual and equitable security arrangements agreed to by both parties, with such arrangements not being reached under the weight of occupation; and fourthly, the establishment of normal peace relations between the two States concerned, meaning Israel and any other Arab State. Egypt believes that these bases, which represent the well-known formula of the principle of land for peace, should be applicable to peace between Israel and other Arab parties concerned.

In this regard, Egypt affirms that the implementation of Security Council 242 resolution (1967) is an indivisible, integral whole. The Israeli claims that we have heard from time to time that that resolution can be applicable to one negotiating track and not to the other, or to certain Arab territories and not to all occupied Arab territories, are totally unacceptable, because they have no legal basis and display a lack of proper understanding of resolution 242 (1967), which does not distinguish either in spirit or in letter between the territories occupied by Israel by force in 1967, whether in Sinai, the Syrian Golan or the West Bank and Gaza. All of the territories that were occupied by Israel should be evacuated.

This is the principle enshrined in the United Nations Charter and the principle that the United Nations has applied since its inception. It is the only principle on which comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East can be founded.

Egypt deeply regrets the halting of the Syrian-Israeli negotiations in the wake of the failure of the Geneva summit held last May between the late Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad and United States President Clinton. It was a failure to achieve a settlement that would have given Syria all of its occupied territories and would have guaranteed a return to the borders of 4 June 1967. I would like to reaffirm our unwavering position in support of Syria's full right to regain the Golan without any conditions, this being the only means for establishing peace between Syria and Israel. I would also like to state that Israel's commitment to seriously and sincerely negotiating for the realization of peace should encompass all tracks at the same level, without distinction and without any attempt to use one track against the other. Egypt believes there is a link between progress on the various bilateral negotiating tracks and regional cooperation in all its aspects.

The desire to establish peace in the Middle East is an integral whole. There can be no talk now of normal relations between Israel and any other Arab party outside that clear understanding. We quite honestly believe that the final communiqué of the Extraordinary Arab Summit hosted by Egypt in Cairo on 21 and 22 October 2000 was very clear in that regard. In this context, I would like to quote the following from that document:

> "While emphasizing that the halt to the peace process on all bilateral tracks has caused the suspension of the multilateral track, the Arab leaders affirm that issues of regional cooperation cannot be addressed without real progress towards a just and comprehensive peace in the region. The halt in the peace process caused by Israel's policy and by its provocative practices makes talk of a common future in the region untimely. They hereby decide not to resume or participate in any official or informal activity in the multilateral framework and to suspend all measures and activities for regional economic cooperation with Israel in this framework and to link their resumption and their scope to the attainment of tangible progress towards a just and comprehensive peace on all the tracks of the peace progress." (*A/55/513, p. 5*)

The establishment of comprehensive peace in the Middle East will provide a true foundation for the overall security of all parties in the region. Egypt therefore continues to demand — as it has since 1990, when President Hosni Mubarak launched an initiative to declare the region free of all weapons of mass destruction — that the Middle East region be rid of all nuclear weapons. I would also like to mention here Israel's continuous refusal to agree to any inspections or confidence-building measures with regard to its nuclear facilities. Those facilities serve as an additional element of political and military tension in a region already under a great deal of tension.

It should be clear to everyone that security in the Middle East means security for all, and not just for one party or another. Peace and security are indivisible, and it is only through the establishment of security that there will be just peace in the Middle East. Egypt continues to hope that it will be possible to reach a true, comprehensive and peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, although that hope has been tested by the many negative experiences of recent months emanating from the Israeli side.

I would like to repeat that our hope is based on the conviction that peace is the only option available in the Middle East. I would also like to reassert that Israel's behaviour should be in keeping with the objective at hand, namely, peace. We hope Israel will realize both the importance and the necessity of modifying its behaviour and working methods in the region so as to convince the other parties in the region of its seriousness and its true desire for peace. Otherwise, the current tension in the region may

become a long and painful prelude to a phase that all of us had hoped we had left behind.

Mr. Ling (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): Yesterday, on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, many Member States of the United Nations once again reaffirmed the urgent importance of holding discussions in the Assembly about the situation that has arisen on the West Bank of the River Jordan and in the Gaza Strip. It is clear that the peace process in the region, for which the international community has made enormous efforts through the years, is once again under serious threat. We must once again note with regret that there has been not only a considerable escalation of violence between Israel and Palestine, but also a threat of destabilization in southern Lebanon and the Golan Heights.

The world community rightly took note of the important step taken by Israel to fulfil the provisions of Security Council 425 (1978) by withdrawing its forces from the territory of southern Lebanon. Unfortunately, however, subsequent developments have borne out the grim forecasts made at that time that those measures would not be enough to establish a climate of trust and foster progress towards a settlement and lasting peace in the region. The current situation eloquently testifies to the need for urgent additional measures to ensure the full implementation of the Security Council's basic resolutions in all areas — from settling the crisis between Palestinians and Israelis to full withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Syrian Golan.

Belarus has consistently supported the position of the Non-Aligned Movement with regard to all aspects of a settlement in the Middle East. During the emergency special session of the General Assembly, resumed on 18 October, Belarus expressed its support for the draft resolution condemning the provocative actions of the Israeli side. At the Economic and Social Council session that was resumed on 22 November 2000, we voted for the decision regarding serious and massive violations of human rights by Israel. As part of today's debate, we would once again like to stress the need for a continuation of consistent measures to ensure the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied Syrian Golan.

We are convinced that the United Nations must be in the vanguard of the international community's efforts to bring about a settlement of the crisis in the Middle East. Today we see that the United Nations has an opportunity to make an important contribution to that process, and that it is in fact capable of doing so. The recent mandate given by the Security Council to the Secretary-General to seek a convergence of the positions held by the Palestinian and Israeli sides is a vivid confirmation of that. Belarus sincerely hopes that Mr. Kofi Annan will be able to undertake further efforts on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks as well.

Belarus shares the view of the overwhelming majority of the United Nations membership as to the need for action rather than just words in order to achieve real progress in the Middle East. We hope that further effective steps will be taken by the Security Council, are we are prepared to take part in the search for decisions in the General Assembly. In the balance are the lives of many innocent citizens and children on both sides of this conflict. Any further escalation of violence would be a sad demonstration of the impotence of the world community and would have the most tragic consequences. That we should not allow this to take place follows from the principles and values enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and in the norms of international humanitarian law.

Mr. Ka (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): The question of the Middle East continues to be a source of great concern for the international community, which remains convinced that world peace depends to a great extent on the settlement of that question.

It is therefore with great satisfaction that we Senegalese welcomed in May the decision of the Israeli Government to withdraw its troops from southern Lebanon after more than 20 years. That situation is due to Senegal's special relationship with the fraternal people of Lebanon and the restored sovereignty of this country over its southern occupied territories.

That feeling was based on what we saw in this decision, namely a strong signal on the part of Israel to move forward in the comprehensive process of a political settlement of the Middle East crisis. In the context of negotiations with the Palestinian Authority and the reaffirmed will of Mr. Barak's Government to lift the veil of misunderstanding with Syria, it was a promising sign for all of the peoples in the region.

However, it seems that certain Israeli circles traditionally opposed to that process decided to sabotage that praiseworthy choice. There does not seem to be any other way of interpreting the appearance on 28 September last, on the forecourt of a Jerusalem

mosque, of Mr. Ariel Sharon, whose name alone evokes, in the collective subconscious of the Palestinian and Lebanese Arab people, the memory of untold suffering. That appearance, which was neither neutral nor gratuitous, made it impossible to continue — or at the very least curbed for some time — the process of the settlement of the question of Palestine, which, I need hardly remind the Assembly, is the core of the Middle East crisis.

The logical result of that act of defiance, the uprising by the peoples of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and the two-month-old insurrection have together caused the deaths of hundreds and left thousands wounded, notably among the Palestinians. There is great despair in the heart of these millions of men and women, particularly the young people, who wish to live in freedom and dignity in the land of their ancestors and to have their inalienable rights restored.

The Security Council, which has the responsibility to ensure world peace and to defuse any dangerous situation, must work, by means of realistic modalities, to adopt relevant resolutions on the Middle East. That concern has been a categorical requirement demanded by all international forums that have met over the last few weeks and that have dealt with this thorny question.

Our delegation believes that the Arab League summit, held in September in Cairo, was a praiseworthy example of awareness and responsibility. While expressing their unreserved condemnation of the disproportionate use of force by the Israeli security services, the leaders of the Arab world reiterated also their commitment to the peace process, despite the frank reservations, and even the open hostility, of public opinion.

That same position of principle was reconfirmed by the summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, held from 12 to 14 November at Doha, which reiterated its firm support for the just cause of the Palestinian people and its will to do everything possible to relaunch the peace process.

In the interim between those two events, the Commission on Human Rights, meeting in a special session in October in Geneva, also deplored the fate of the civilian population in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza. In Africa, in Europe and in Asia, as well as in the Americas, several highly placed persons called upon Israel strictly to respect international conventions and humanitarian law, notably the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

It has become abundantly clear that the protection of the population is not being ensured. Incidents are increasing in the territories, with, as a result, people killed and injured, mourned by desperate mothers. The sealing off of Palestinian territories has now become systematic. Economic sanctions have paralysed the administrative services of the Authority, and armed settlers are sowing terror among the innocent civilian population.

The anguished appeal of the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Arafat, for a United Nations protection force for the Palestinian people must be heard. His 10 November visit to the Security Council made clear once again the limits of the constructive commitment of the international community.

On the pretext that the world Organization must not interfere in the Oslo process, any initiative on its part thus risks being blocked in the Security Council. However, a good opportunity has just been missed with the proposal of President Arafat, which could have given the Palestinian side cause for hope. That confidence-building measure would have defused tension between the Israeli and Palestinian communities and enabled the international fact-finding committee to carry out its mission properly.

I wish now to turn to the question of the transfer of the diplomatic missions of certain countries to Jerusalem. While we recognize the right of all countries to establish diplomatic relations with any State, in accordance with the general principles of international relations, the Senegalese delegation, on the basis of those very principles, wishes to reaffirm that such transfers to Jerusalem do not conform to international law and must be discouraged.

The Syrian Golan is an important aspect of the Middle East question. Along the lines of the decision taken by the Government of Prime Minister Barak with respect to southern Lebanon, new approaches should be explored for the unconditional return of Syrian sovereignty over the Golan Heights. From that point, all related questions — security and access to water resources — could be the subjects of mutually beneficial agreements. Senegal still feels that the glimmer of hope seen in Sheperdstown and Geneva

will, in the coming months, become a guiding light for Syrian-Israeli relations in the future.

The situation in which the Middle East has been mired for approximately 50 years requires the international community to strive to resolve the entirety of the problems preventing harmony among the peoples of that sensitive region. Besides the questions of peace and the legitimate recovery of land, there are three other collateral issues which I believe should be taken into account in any plan for a viable peace in the region. These issues are the need to adopt a system of collective security acceptable to all, the importance of a comprehensive settlement of the question of refugees and other displaced persons, and a satisfactory solution to the issue of access to water resources for all populations.

If we take care appropriately to address these issues, the promise of Oslo can be kept. It is therefore time for the protagonists to respect their commitments and to cease their procrastinating so that patience does not become resentment and vengeful hatred. It is time to mobilize all our energy to save what is essential: the peace process, which we continue to believe to be an irreversible strategic choice for the peoples of the Middle East, whom we urge — Israelis and Arabs alike — to live in peace, security and reinvented harmony.

Mr. Al-Sindi (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): In the past, we discussed the question of Palestine; today, we are considering the situation in the Middle East. Palestine is at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the region has experienced tensions, wars and crises on its account. On its account, we continue to recall the Israeli aggression against the Arab States in June 1967, which led to further occupation of land by force and clearly demonstrated Israel's expansionist intentions and intransigence in refusing any just and comprehensive peace in the region. On its account, Israel is seeking to develop its military potential and to acquire the most sophisticated and lethal weapons. Upon the emergence of any sign of hope, Israel persists in creating setbacks and deliberately sabotaging measures already undertaken for peace.

General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on the Middle East are the basic references for a just and comprehensive settlement. Security Council resolutions 478 (1980) and 497 (1981) declare Israel's decision to impose its laws on the holy city of Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan as null and void and without international legal effect. They also call upon those States that have established diplomatic missions at Jerusalem to withdraw such missions from the Holy City.

Numerous resolutions have been adopted, from resolution 181 (II), through resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), to the most recent, resolution 1322 (2000). Many conferences have been convened, beginning with the Madrid Peace Conference on the Middle East and ending with the initiative taken by Presidents Hosni Mubarak and Bill Clinton at the Sharm el-Sheikh summit and the efforts undertaken by Secretary-General Kofi Annan to halt the violence and aggression.

Every year, representatives of States of the world declare from this rostrum their condemnation of the ongoing Israeli rejection of all efforts to achieve peace in the region. Israel escalates and creates new crises in the region, the latest of which was intended to be bloody and inimical to a prompt return to peace. It thereby challenges the entire international community without exception, given that the main sponsor of the peace process, the United States, finds itself in the unenviable position of being unable to perform its duty, despite its recognition of the just cause of the Arab world.

Mr. Mungra (Suriname), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Peace and stability in the Middle East region will be established only on the basis of just principles, such as the principle of land for peace. The reference points for peace and stability must include international legal resolutions and the full withdrawal of Israel from all territories occupied since 1967. Other points must include enabling the Palestinian people abroad to return to their land and to regain their legitimate rights to evacuate the settlers implanted in their territories, the withdrawal of Israel's armies, the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, the full withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967 and the release of political prisoners from Israeli jails.

On this occasion, and in order to achieve more stability and security, our delegation is of the view that comprehensive disarmament, particularly Israeli nuclear weaponry, is one of the main issues that may

make our region free from all weapons of mass destruction.

My delegation looks forward to the day when peace and security will be achieved and stability and prosperity will prevail.

Mr. Zackheos (Cyprus): I would have wished that in this year's discussion we would be hailing the positive developments of the peace process — a peace process that would set the stage for the final solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict and would open a new chapter in the long and tormented history of our region.

Instead, and despite the gallant efforts of Prime Minister Barak, President Arafat and other international and regional leaders, the forces of extremism have managed to scuttle the drive towards peace, leading to the current, simply unacceptable, situation with the spiralling of violence and the tragic loss of life.

Speaker after speaker in this debate has expressed the concern of the international community over the current situation and has urged an end to the violence. Cyprus joins its voice with them. The resurgence of violence in the Middle East is particularly disturbing. Cyprus believes that the Palestinian issue constitutes the core of the Middle East conflict, and without its just settlement the international community cannot hope to reach a comprehensive and lasting solution to the Middle East problem. We reiterate our support for a just and lasting settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The current situation has aptly demonstrated the explosive consequences of the long delay in the solution of the Palestinian problem, a solution that would have put an end to the grave situation of the Palestinian people and would have ensured the fulfilment of their legitimate rights, including their right to statehood.

While strongly condemning any and all forms of terrorism, including the bombings aimed against civilians in Israel, at the same time we urge Israel to desist from actions whose thrust is the collective punishment of the Palestinian population and which are certain to widen the chasm between the two sides. Action brings reaction and, with it, further blows to the prospects for peace.

We fully subscribe to the position of the European Union concerning the negative impact of the Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories. The deterioration of the economic situation of the Palestinian population will breed more violence and the frustration that stems from the lack of tangible benefits from the peace process. We urge Israel to withdraw its forces to the positions they held on 28 September and to avoid disproportionate response to violence. At the same time we urge the Palestinian Authority to exert every effort to control outbursts of violence. Only in this way will this destructive cycle of hatred subside.

A lesson drawn from the present escalation of violence is that unless peace efforts and initiatives are based on international law, the peace achieved will remain on very shaky foundations. Another lesson is that tensions in the Palestinian territories ultimately have adverse consequences and carry the potential of escalation throughout the region.

We call on both parties to exercise the maximum degree of self-restraint so as to return to an atmosphere conducive to the resumption of negotiations. This is not the time for mutual recriminations; this is a time for mutual action in support of the peace process. This is the time for full respect for the commitments undertaken in Sharm el-Sheikh and in Gaza on 2 November 2000. The international community gives its full backing to these efforts. The will of the international community for an end to violence and for a just and comprehensive solution of the Middle East problem is an undeniable fact. The principles that should guide the approach to the problem are also well established. They include sanctity of life, particularly of children, respect for religious sites and full adherence to international law — international humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention and the speedy implementation of United Nations resolutions.

Cyprus strongly supports the efforts of the international community and the Secretary-General of the United Nations for the full implementation of United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolution 1322 (2000).

On a more positive note, Cyprus welcomed the implementation of resolution 425 (1978) with the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon earlier this year.

We also hope that an improvement of the climate in the region will allow the resumption of the negotiations between Israel and Syria. Consistent with

our long-held policy, we reiterate our support for the withdrawal of Israel from the Golan Heights so as to achieve a comprehensive solution to the Middle East problem that would lead to the establishment of a durable peace in the region. A necessary component of peace should be security for all the States in the region, including Israel. Peace should also usher in a new era of regional economic cooperation and the pursuit of other measures that will benefit the region as a whole and will reduce the number and kind of weapons which threaten to engulf the region in major disasters.

In conclusion, I would like to express my hope that the numerous difficulties that exist, however daunting, will not deter the drive towards peace. As President Clerides said,

> "Our region has paid a dreadful price through the many wars it has already experienced. There is no need for history to repeat itself."

We support all international initiatives and efforts, including those of Presidents Clinton and Mubarak as well as King Abdullah, aimed at preventing the conflict from escalating further and at bringing peace and stability to our region. Cyprus has already conveyed to the parties its readiness to host any meeting or offer any other assistance that they deem appropriate. We join the international community in expressing our hope that efforts will be redoubled for the survival and ultimate successful outcome of the peace process, upon which millions of people, both in the region and throughout the world, have placed their hopes.

Mr. Johan Thani (Brunei Darussalam): Brunei Darussalam is pleased to once again participate in the discussion on the important issue before us today. We have taken note of the Secretary-General's report on the developments in the Middle East. We appreciate his efforts and look forward to his continued involvement.

The core issue in the Middle East is the Palestine question, which remains far from being solved. After several decades of struggle, the Palestinians are still denied their aspirations, and their legitimate rights are continuously violated. Brunei Darussalam is particularly concerned with the ongoing tension and violence in Palestine, especially in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Those tragic events are threatening to derail progress made in the peace process.

The problem is becoming more serious, judging from the increasing number of deaths and casualties recently. On this note, Brunei Darussalam would like to encourage the commission of inquiry set up by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to gather information on the violations of human rights and grave breaches of international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territories. At the same time, Brunei Darussalam hopes that a decision will be made regarding the establishment of a 2000-strong United Nations observer force, which could at least help to restore order and bring an end to the violence in that area.

Brunei Darussalam also commends the concerted efforts by countries involved in trying to bring the parties concerned to the negotiating table. We would like to further encourage the leaders of both Palestine and Israel to continue to work towards a peaceful and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian problem based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

Finally, Brunei Darussalam wishes to reaffirm its long-standing support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinians and hopes that their struggle for peace and freedom will bring about a just and lasting settlement.

Mr. Stuart (Australia): For Australia, the developments in the Middle East over the past year have produced both hope and deep frustration.

The Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon and the second Camp David summit raised our hopes. But during these last two months, cycles of provocation, violence and retribution have gravely damaged them. Australia is deeply concerned at the loss of life, injury and the damage to mutual confidence between Israel and the Palestinians that have occurred, something which our Prime Minister has described as "heartbreaking". We have urged both sides to halt the cycle of violence by exercising strong leadership and greater restraint.

We understand the grief and uncertainty that now prevail between Israel and the Palestinians. We appreciate the frustration that is felt amongst many countries, especially within the Muslim and Jewish communities, at what has happened. But recriminations sow only bitterness and do not restore the mutual confidence upon which an effective peace process must be built. We believe that in the current context

unbalanced criticism and the singling out of one side only for blame are both deeply unhelpful.

Unilateral steps and recriminations are not the answer to the present situation. Neither is the use of violence or excessive force. There is no real alternative for either side to achieving a negotiated settlement. Failing that, further violence, misery and human degradation may destroy that path for generations to come.

Australia remains fundamentally committed to Israel's right to live within secure and recognized borders. At the same time, Australia also supports the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to a homeland and a better future for their children.

Notwithstanding the tragic events of recent weeks, we are committed to playing a positive and constructive part in support of peace in the region. We will continue to uphold the principles of international law upon which dealings between the parties should be conducted. We will continue to condemn the use of politically motivated violence by any party.

We strongly support the call of the International Committee of the Red Cross for both sides to respect, and to ensure respect for, international humanitarian law and its principles. All those involved must respect civilians, medical personnel and the activities of ambulances and hospitals. Misuse of protective emblems must be prevented.

Terrorist acts, reprisals against the civilian population and other attacks directed against the civilian population on either side are absolutely and unconditionally prohibited.

We continue to regard settlement activity in the territories occupied during the 1967 war as contrary to international law and harmful to the peace process.

In September 2000 Australia opened the Australian representative office in Ramallah. The office will substantially facilitate our dealings with the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Gaza and will enable Australia to promote other objectives more effectively, including support for democracy and good governance.

Australia has made tangible commitments to the Middle East peace process through targeted development assistance. Our development assistance programme, together with our emergency aid to the Palestinians, is worth roughly A$8 million in this year. Over half of our contribution will be allocated to the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which remains the primary agency for the delivery of international assistance to Palestinian refugees. We value highly its contribution.

We shall continue to fund the activities of non-governmental organizations in the fields of education, employment generation and health services. We have programmes to transfer Australian skills and technology to the agricultural and legal sectors. We have also provided emergency medical assistance to those wounded in the current violence. We are deeply concerned by the humanitarian consequences of the closure of Gaza and the West Bank, including reported obstructions to the distribution of food, fuel and medical supplies. All sides must ensure the free movement of ambulances, medical teams and medical supplies into and within the West Bank and Gaza.

The Middle East is a region where the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery vehicles remains a major concern for the international community. Non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is, moreover, a key component of the broader vision of peace in the Middle East. We strongly urge all States in the Middle East that have not already done so to become parties to all relevant international arms control instruments. We urge those that are parties to those instruments to adhere to both their spirit and their letter.

Another critical element of the nuclear non-proliferation regime is the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). We take this opportunity to call upon all regional States that have yet to sign or ratify this Treaty to do so without delay, in particular those whose ratification is a prerequisite for the Treaty's entry into force.

A further step in reducing tensions in the Middle East would be negotiation and implementation of a fissile material cut-off treaty. Such a treaty is the logical next step on the disarmament agenda. Middle East members of the Conference on Disarmament have clear interests in pressing for early commencement of cut-off negotiations.

The threat that chemical and biological weapons pose to regional and global security should be countered through adherence to the Chemical and Biological Weapons Conventions. Australia urges all

States in the region to ratify both treaties. In addition, we urge all States in the region to support efforts to bring negotiations on a protocol to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention to a speedy and successful conclusion.

We also urge Middle East States to contribute to efforts to strengthen the global regime against landmines, including by ratifying the Ottawa Convention, and we urge these States to exercise maximum restraint in the development and proliferation of long-range ballistic missiles.

In every region, a positive security environment depends on States meeting their international obligations. We share the concern of others that the weapons verification and monitoring work in Iraq mandated by the Security Council has not been possible for close to two years. The continued lack of assurance about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq can only have a destabilizing effect on the region as a whole.

We note that the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) is ready to commence preparatory work in Iraq for resumption of the tasks envisaged by the Security Council. What is needed now is for Iraq to comply fully with all Security Council requirements in relation to its weapons programmes. Allowing UNMOVIC to proceed with its work would be an important and most welcome step. We fail to understand why the Iraqi leadership has yet to take the straightforward, necessary steps required to fulfil its international obligations.

We congratulate the Secretary-General, and the Governments concerned, for achieving the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) and enabling the Lebanese Government to restore progressively control over its territory. We welcome the expanded role of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon in verifying the Israeli withdrawal and laying the foundations for peace and security in the border area.

Australia urges both Israel and Syria to proceed to resolve their own outstanding differences and to build a comprehensive peace based on the implementation of Security Council resolution 242 (1967) and Security Council resolution 338 (1973), the Oslo Accords and the application of the principle of land for peace.

The Australian Prime Minister, Mr. Howard, visited the region in April this year. In discussions with both Prime Minister Barak and Chairman Arafat, he urged both sides to persevere through the challenges presented by the negotiating process.

Australia has long taken the view that the issues so tragically dividing the Israeli and Palestinian peoples must ultimately be resolved through direct negotiation based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the Oslo Accords and the principle of land for peace.

We welcome the courage and commitment of major players in the Middle East situation — including in particular the United States, but also the key regional Governments, including Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia — in sustaining movement towards a comprehensive, just and lasting peace. Their efforts have prevented a drift to despair.

We were encouraged when, at the second Camp David Summit in July, remarkable progress was made in narrowing differences on deeply sensitive issues, which until then had been considered too difficult to address. Though unable to bridge all the gaps between the parties, the new flexibility that was shown then strengthened our belief that, with courage and commitment, ways would be found to settle historic grievances on the basis of security, individual dignity and mutual respect.

The history of the Middle East peace process has shown us that what cannot be achieved in battle can be accomplished around the negotiating table. After halting the current violence, our first concern should be the earliest possible return to the search for a negotiated settlement based on the remarkable progress achieved prior to these latest, tragic events.

No side can expect to achieve its ideal objectives, and the way back to the negotiating table will be tough. But we believe that with courage, leadership and flexibility, the prize of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace remains within reach.

Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Middle East question, with the question of Palestine at its core, remains an important item on the Assembly's agenda, particularly at a time when the Palestinian people are being subjected to armed attacks and the use of unjustified force by the Israeli occupation forces, which will only lead to more

bloodshed, further crises in the peace process and further deterioration between the parties and in the region as a whole.

My delegation is deeply concerned about the latest escalation begun by Israel in recent weeks, which has taken on serious dimensions in the past few days, thus threatening peace and stability in the entire region. We therefore call upon the international community to shoulder its responsibilities towards the Palestinian people by immediately providing them international protection by dispatching an international observer force to the occupied territories, under the auspices of the United Nations. We also call for the immediate initiation of the work of the international committee of inquiry.

Our understanding of peace, as we have repeatedly reaffirmed before the Assembly, is that it should be just, lasting and comprehensive. That is the same understanding of the majority of the international parties that are directly involved in the Middle East. question. A commitment to peace should also be fundamental, on the basis of General Assembly resolutions and Security Council resolution 242 (1967), the core of the peace process. However, Security Council and General Assembly resolutions have not been implemented despite being adopted decades ago and despite their reaffirmation at successive Assembly sessions.

Therefore, we wish once again to reaffirm the importance of the United Nations role and responsibility towards the Middle East question and the peace process and the necessity to reactivate that role and responsibility by supporting efforts to advance the peace process to a successful conclusion. The United Nations, its resolutions, its Charter and its provisions are the basic rules for settling conflicts and are the basis of international legitimacy.

The peace process was founded on firm and well-known principles, the most important of which is the principle of land for peace. That principle is contained in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). We do not see how justice can be upheld without full Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab and Palestinian territories. How can we be convinced that peace, the ultimate goal, can be achieved when the Israeli occupation forces launch their attacks against the Palestinian people, Palestinian institutions and civilian facilities? This will only lead to further killing of civilians on both sides. Furthermore, peace cannot be achieved if Israel continues to deny the right of the Palestinian party to justice as a basis for peace and to peace as the framework of security.

There is international legal agreement that East Jerusalem is part and parcel of the West Bank, which was occupied in 1967, and is therefore subject to Security Council resolutions.

Since the beginning of the Israeli occupation, the Security Council has laid special stress on Jerusalem and has taken a particular interest in it. From the outset it has adopted resolutions rejecting Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem and all Israeli practices and jurisdictional actions aimed at changing the character or demographic and geographical status of the holy city. Hence, statements by some Israeli officials claiming Jerusalem to be the eternal capital of Israel run completely counter to the foundations of the peace process. International resolutions have declared Jerusalem to be an occupied city. It is the spiritual capital of the three divine religions, and we therefore want it to remain a noble, ideal symbol of peace and cooperation. That can occur only with full Israeli withdrawal from all territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, and with the return of the city to its legitimate owners so it can become the capital of the Palestinian state.

The question of Palestinian refugees who were driven from their land in 1947, 1948 and 1967 and who have been kept out through the long years of occupation still awaits a just solution in accordance with United Nations resolutions and other resolutions of international legitimacy, in particular General Assembly resolution 194 (III), which sets out the right of Palestinian refugees to return and to receive compensation for their long years of forced exile and occupation and for their massive moral and material losses. We believe that a resolution of this question is another important pillar of peace and security in the region.

My delegation reaffirms its unequivocal support for peace and for the intensification of efforts to halt the deterioration of the situation in the occupied Arab territories and to resume Israeli-Palestinian dialogue with a view to reaching a just and proper solution that will bring about a just peace between the parties.

Mr. Levitte (France) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union.

The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated countries Cyprus and Malta align themselves with this statement.

The Middle East is going through difficult times. I will not again describe the tragic events taking place in the occupied Palestinian territories: the European Union stated its views on that question in the debate on agenda item 41. Restoring calm and resuming the negotiations are a priority. Anger and frustration are bad advisers. The commitments undertaken at the Sharm el-Sheikh summit must be fulfilled. There is no alternative to a peace process, which must lead to coexistence between Israel and a viable Palestinian State. Any measure that can help restore peace and contribute to the resumption of contacts between Israelis and Palestinians must be supported. In that regard, the European Union wishes the fact-finding committee to be able expeditiously to carry out its tasks. In the same spirit, with respect to the possible dispatch of a United Nations observer mission, the European Union hopes that a solution acceptable to both parties can be found without delay through the consultations now being carried out by the Secretary-General under the mandate he has received from the Security Council.

This tragedy cannot be fully dissociated from the lack of a settlement on the Lebanese and Syrian tracks of the peace process. Only a just and comprehensive peace based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), on the terms of reference of the Madrid conference, including the principle of land for peace, and on the agreements reached at Oslo and thereafter will be a lasting one.

In southern Lebanon, a new chapter was opened last May with the Israeli withdrawal. The 15 members of the European Union took note with satisfaction of that decision of the Israeli Government in conformity with Security Council resolution 425 (1978). We supported the Secretary-General's efforts aimed at certifying the Israeli withdrawal and at making possible the redeployment of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), parallel with the Lebanese army's deployment to the South.

The European Union welcomed last summer the renewal of the mandate of UNIFIL in Security Council resolution 1310 (2000), and the redeployment of the international force and the dispatch by the Lebanese Government of a joint security force to the South. Those measures have marked positive steps in the restoration of stability in the South, which is a prerequisite for the reconstruction and economic development of the area. The European Union is prepared to contribute to reconstruction efforts in the region, as it has continued to do in recent years for Lebanon as a whole.

But the grave incidents on the Israeli-Lebanese border since the beginning of October show how fragile the situation in southern Lebanon remains. An escalation of tension remains possible at any time. The European Union calls upon all parties to demonstrate the utmost restraint. Any exacerbation of tension would harm the safety and security of civilians and regional stability, to which the European Union is deeply committed. It is particularly important that all parties strictly respect the "blue line" certified in June by the Secretary-General. It is also essential that the Lebanese Government, in conformity with Security Council resolutions 425 (1978) and 1310 (2000), reassert full authority in the area in order to ensure its stability and to create the conditions necessary for UNIFIL to fulfil its mandate.

The withdrawal of Israel from southern Lebanon and the progressive restoration of Lebanese sovereignty in the area are steps in the right direction. However, they do not resolve the more general matter of the peace process in the region. Only an agreement between Israel and Syria, in conformity with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) as they concern the Golan, can bring about the peace to which all the peoples of the region aspire. The European Union reaffirms its readiness to help revive dialogue between Israel and Syria. We call upon both parties to resume negotiations as soon as circumstances permit, on the basis of principles of international law and of the progress made in the peace process that was initiated in Madrid in 1991.

In the difficult context of the Middle East, the European Union reiterates its commitment to the principle of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all the States of the region. The European Union has never ceased to argue and to act in favour of the stability of the region and of the safety of its peoples, and it will continue to do so. The European Union intends to continue its efforts, in particular through the

activities of its High Representative, Mr. Javier Solana, who was present at the Sharm el-Sheikh summit and is a member of the fact-finding committee, and through those of its Special Envoy, Mr. Miguel Moratinos, in order to facilitate the resumption of negotiations on the three tracks of the peace process.

I would like here to welcome, on behalf of the European Union, the very useful efforts made by the United Nations. Our Secretary-General, working together with the Security Council and the General Assembly, is playing an essential role that is unanimously welcomed and appreciated by all the parties. The success of these efforts facilitated the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon and, on the Palestinian track, the holding of the Sharm el-Sheikh summit.

The European Union is also determined to assist in relaunching, as soon as the conditions have been met, of the multilateral track of the peace process. The European Union is paying particular attention to the working group on regional and economic development, which it chairs. Regional cooperation is the best way of promoting the interests of and ensuring understanding among the States and peoples of the Middle East.

Recognizing the importance of economic prosperity in ensuring political and social stability, the European Union will continue its own significant technical assistance programme in the region. Progress needs to be made towards the establishment of a Euro-Mediterranean zone of free trade and shared prosperity. The Euro-Med meeting of Foreign Ministers, held in Marseilles on 15 and 16 November, constituted a very important step in this direction. That conference, coming five years after the founding conference in Barcelona, attested to the determination to give a fresh impetus to the Euro-Mediterranean partnership.

In conclusion, the European Union would like to reaffirm its firm commitment to a just, comprehensive and lasting peace based on the principles set out in Security Council resolutions. The European Union is prepared to continue to contribute fully to a peaceful and prosperous future in the Middle East.

Mr. Dausá Céspedes (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Palestinian people and the peoples of all the occupied Arab territories have reached the most crucial moment in their history. Madrid, Oslo and other more recent developments made it seem that the peace process would produce real results and would finally permit progress towards a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. All of these efforts, however, have been frustrated by the escalation of aggressive and hostile actions by Israel, the occupying Power, which, instead of demonstrating its will to negotiate or its desire to promote the peace process has continued to carry out ever more violent actions against the Palestinian civilian population, thereby demonstrating its total contempt for the most basic rules of international law, international humanitarian law and the human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arab peoples suffering the bitter reality of life under occupation.

Since the start of the Israeli aggression two months ago, more than 270 people have died and over 11,000 have been injured. Every day, the suffering and pain of Palestinian and Arab families increases because of the incalculable human cost of the limitless violence that has been unleashed.

The suspension of the Paris Economic Protocol, the economic blockade, the direct attacks against economically important facilities, the closure of crossing points and the hindering of access to places of work, as well as other measures that Israel has taken in its economic war, threaten to destroy Palestinian economy, which has already suffered losses in excess of $1 billion.

Likewise, problems have increased in the health-care and education sectors, while sanitary conditions are worsening, as are the psychological consequences, which are an intrinsic part of the terrible situation now being experienced by the Arab peoples in the occupied territories.

Equally deplorable is the fact that, in parallel with this new aggression, the Israeli Government's policy of illegal settlements is continuing, as are the deportations, mistreatment and many other abuses directed against the Arab population. Measures such as these, and others aimed at altering the legal status and the demographic composition of the Arab territories under occupation — measures that were always invalid — are also in breach of international law and international humanitarian law.

It is hard to believe that, as we enter the twenty-first century, despite more than 26 Security Council resolutions and many more General Assembly resolutions, adopted during both regular and special sessions, we have been unable to arrive at a definitive resolution of the conflict in the Middle East. This

shameful reality can be explained only by Israel's total failure to respect those decisions of the international community and by the various forms of support that the Government of the United States has traditionally provided, within and outside the United Nations, to its strategic ally in the region.

The facts have once again eloquently demonstrated that the Security Council is in urgent need of far-reaching reform if we truly want it to be able, impartially, objectively and transparently, to fulfil the responsibilities assigned to it under the United Nations Charter for the maintenance of international peace and security.

For the people and the Government of Cuba, solidarity with the Palestinian people and the other Arab peoples under occupation is a matter of principle. This is reflected in support for and defence of the unconditional respect for all the legitimate rights of those fraternal peoples. That is why we once again reiterate that the Israeli aggression and its occupation of all the Arab and Palestinian territories, as well as to the violation of the human rights of the peoples of those territories, must be brought to an end.

The problem of Palestine is the cornerstone of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and there can be no definitive solution if the just demands of its heroic people are not met. Neither can there be any lasting solution without an end to the aggression and occupation of the territories in the Syrian Golan.

The international community hopes and demands that peace will prevail over aggression and that the peace process may restore to us the hopes that we once placed in it. Only firm and decisive action can change the present course of events. However, any decision that does not call for strict respect by Israel of the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, particularly Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), rather than bringing us closer to a definitive resolution of the conflict in the region, will only take us even farther from it.

We have a great responsibility. That is why we must promote more economic, political and moral support for the peace process. The military aggression and the occupation must end, as must the infringement of the rights of the Palestinian and Arab peoples. It is time for Israel to truly demonstrate its willingness to negotiate and its commitment to peace in the region. It is time for all the forces in support of peace to unite in defence of the noble cause of the Palestinian and Arab peoples subject to occupation. In that effort, the traditional solidarity and support of the Government and the people of Cuba will not be wanting.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) *(spoke in French)*: It is precisely two months since violence erupted in the Middle East. Unfortunately, every day that goes by seems to lead to nothing but doubt, fear and pessimism as a result of that conflict, which we fear might spread throughout the whole region.

Since 29 September 2000, the day of the outbreak of the conflict, everything has been said, so it is no longer the time for sterile exhortations or condemnations. What is important now is to seek all necessary ways and means that could lead to an end to the violence and establish peace, before hatred — because that is increasingly what we are dealing with — turns these confrontations to a world cataclysm.

The question of the Middle East is, above all, a tangle of facts, circumstances, beliefs, myths and realities, all combined in a threefold issue: the security of a State, Israel; the protection of a national heritage, that of the Palestinian people; and respect for the holy sites claimed by Islam, Christianity and Judaism. We should recall that it was a violation of one of these sanctuaries that, as the saying goes, set off the powder keg.

The question of the Middle East can be understood only if we look at it as a whole. At least three requirements have to be taken into account for the settlement of differences. First of all, there has to be a real willingness on the part of the leaders to establish understanding and peace. If that willingness does not initially exist, any beginnings of peace are but an illusion. We realize that now, with the death of Yitzhak Rabin, that apostle of peace whose sincere desire to resolve the question had allowed for real progress towards peace. Today we are witnessing procrastination, a "hesitation waltz" of the Israeli leaders.

Therefore, the international community — primarily the United Nations and the agreed facilitators, or sponsors of this process — must concentrate totally on this crisis and, above all, use their influence to convince the two parties to display resolutely their desire for peace. In saying this, we wish to commend the Secretary-General for his

personal commitment in that direction, in particular for the part he played in the results obtained at Sharm el-Sheikh on 17 October 2000.

The second requirement for a settlement is the guarantee of security for Israel, whose borders must be internationally recognized. In re-establishing the Israeli people on a territory, the primary concern of the United Nations was clearly to guarantee their right to life, to a land and to a homeland. The ostracism of the State of Israel is no longer appropriate. But, since this de jure recognition is now imprescriptible, its corollary is that Palestine also, and especially, must be able to live and prosper within the territorial limits resulting from the 1947 status quo. In other words, Israel must bow to that constraint, upon which its very existence depends. This means that it would have to give back the territories it acquired in 1967 — that is, it must respect strictly the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1322 (2000). In that respect, we welcome as a positive step Israel's disengagement from Lebanon.

The establishment of settlements is clearly unacceptable, because it compromises any prospect of finding a solution, particularly as the establishment of these unauthorized settlements is still continuing.

In Burkina Faso, the democratic spirit has given us an unqualified love for peace, justice, tolerance and freedom. All of these virtues convince us that it is through negotiation, not war, that the conflict in the Middle East will be resolved. All of the parties must be convinced of this and miss no opportunity to progress towards peace.

In our view, the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference on the Middle East, leading to the Oslo Accords, set out the wisest and most realistic course to a just and acceptable solution to the question of the Middle East. Other agreements, such as the Wye River Memorandum and the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, prove that the virtues of negotiation have not lost their validity, even when the problem is as complex and thorny as the Middle East — provided, however, that the Secretary-General's appeal is heard by all of us. He recommends that all of the parties must fully respect the commitments they have made under the agreements in force. In other words, they must refrain from any act that prejudges the result of the negotiations and worsens the political and economic situation in the Palestinian territories and must scrupulously respect their obligations under international law.

Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia): Over the years, scores of resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly and the Security Council have reiterated the need for a comprehensive peace for the Middle East which would include a just and final settlement of the Palestinian question. Regrettably, such a peace remains as elusive as ever, even when many other conflict situations in other parts of the world have long been resolved. Indeed, instead of peace we are witnessing a new spiral of violence in Palestine, particularly in Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

Malaysia reiterates its strong condemnation of the excessive and disproportionate use of force by Israeli security forces against Palestinians in the occupied territories, including Jerusalem. We condemn the continuation of these excesses, which have resulted in more than 300 deaths — mostly of Palestinian civilians — and the wounding of many thousands of mostly Palestinian civilians.

The current deplorable situation affecting the Palestinians must be brought to a halt immediately, and in this regard we would urge the international community to support the expeditious establishment of a United Nations observer force that would, inter alia, ensure the protection of civilians, while at the same time help in defusing the current explosive situation. The matter is now before the Security Council, which, we hope, will take speedy action to establish the United Nations observer force. Lack of action by the Security Council on this urgent proposal by Palestine, which is strongly supported by the non-aligned members of the Council, will reflect negatively on the credibility of the Council and will send a wrong signal to both the oppressed and oppressors, with possible grave consequences on the ground. We also hope that the fact-finding committee that has been established pursuant to the Sharm el-Sheikh agreement will be able to carry out its work expeditiously and without hindrance.

Beyond condemning the ongoing assault on Palestinian civilians, the international community should also condemn the occupying Power's general policy of oppression and suppression of the Arab population in the occupied territories, including Jerusalem, as manifested by the ongoing confiscation of Palestinian lands, the demolition of Arab-owned

houses and the relentless expansion of illegal Jewish settlements in the occupied territories. Clearly, the perpetuation of those policies is not conducive to reviving the peace process. On the contrary, it would contribute to exacerbating the current tense situation, thereby feeding the conflict. We fail to appreciate the logic of those policies and practices, unless they are deliberately intended to prolong the conflict for reasons best known to Israel.

It is equally regrettable that there has been no progress in the peace talks between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic, which were suspended in 1996. My delegation is deeply concerned that the inhabitants of the Syrian Golan continue to live under Israeli occupation, with all the deprivations, humiliations and other indignities that life under occupation entails. The continued existence — indeed, expansion — of Jewish settlements in occupied Syrian Golan remains a major stumbling block to a resumption of the Syrian-Israeli peace process and calls into question the seriousness of Israel in seeking peace with its neighbour, the Syrian Arab Republic. We call on Israel to abandon those policies and resume peace negotiations on the principle of land for peace, which alone will guarantee its long-term peace and security in the region.

On the security front, while there have been no serious incidents, the situation remains potentially volatile and dangerous. The continued occupation of the Syrian Golan by Israel constitutes a serious impediment to achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region. Malaysia therefore reiterates its call for the withdrawal of all occupation forces to the line of 4 June 1967 as an indispensable element of any peace settlement for the region.

The renewal by the Security Council last Monday of the mandate of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) reminds us of the still tense situation between the two countries. My delegation shares the Secretary-General's observation in his report contained in document S/2000/1103, that

> "Despite the present quiet in the Israel-Syria sector, the situation in the Middle East continues to be potentially dangerous and is likely to remain so unless and until a comprehensive settlement covering all aspects of the Middle East problem can be reached." (*S/2000/1103, para. 11*)

We look forward to the early resumption of the peace process and the implementation of the Security Council resolutions 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

On the issue of Lebanon, while there has been some progress in the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) following Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon, the situation in the area remains volatile. In his report to the Security Council contained in document S/2000/1049 on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the Secretary-General stated that his report was being written at a time of high tension in Arab-Israeli relations and continuing confrontations in the occupied Palestinian territories. He therefore deemed it prudent not to submit suggestions for the reconfiguration of the United Nations presence in southern Lebanon. The recent incident at the Blue Line in Lebanon underscores the urgent need to ensure full respect by all parties for the withdrawal line, on the ground as well as in the air. We echo the Secretary-General's call for restraint at a time when even small military actions have the potential to cause a serious escalation of tensions and hostilities in the region.

My delegation takes this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, who is also the Secretary-General's Personal Representative to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, and Mr. Rolf Knutsson, the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to southern Lebanon. We wish them well in continuing the good work of coordinating United Nations and international assistance to the Palestinian people and Lebanon, respectively. We also wish to commend the men and women who are serving, and have served, with UNDOF and UNIFIL for their courageous work in a difficult and often dangerous environment, risking life and limb for the cause of international peace and security.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to reaffirm its position that a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, or West Asia, can be achieved only with the complete withdrawal of Israeli armed forces and settlers from all Arab and Palestinian lands occupied since 1967, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the occupied Syrian Golan. We also reaffirm that establishing an independent State of Palestine with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, on the basis of the principle of land for peace, along with the

implementation of all international resolutions on the Middle East issue, is the only guarantee for lasting peace in the region. We once again call on Israel, the occupying Power, to comply with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), and all other relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

Mr. Shobokshi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Since it was established over a half century ago, the United Nations has been able to help end numerous wars and conflicts that threatened regional and international peace and security. It has also contributed a great deal to ending colonialism in many parts of the world. What remains to be done is for the United Nations to work to end Israel's occupation of Palestine, the Shebaa farms in southern Lebanon, and the Syrian Golan, which was occupied in 1967.

The world's attention turned to Madrid in 1991, where the first round of Middle East peace talks were held. Those talks revived hopes that we could bring to a long overdue end an unjust occupation and stop a conflict that continues to take a heavy toll of victims. Hopes were also raised for the building of security, stability and constructive cooperation. Ten years after Madrid, stability seems far from possible, security appears nearly impossible and peace is still just a hope.

Despite the peace negotiations in Madrid, which were followed by bilateral and multilateral talks, Palestinians continue to be besieged by Jewish settlements, which are expanding every day.

Because of the occupation forces, the Palestinians are dispersed throughout the region, in isolated areas. They are isolated not only from each other but also from their Arab environment.

The occupying forces continue to perpetrate the worst kind of injustices and the most heinous kind of oppressive measures against landowners. They confiscate land, destroy houses, erect barriers, impose sieges and prevent food and medical supplies from reaching the Palestinians. They also prevent them from getting economic and humanitarian assistance, violate Islamic sanctity, and attack them with rockets, tanks and internationally prohibited weapons, using fixed-wing aircraft and helicopter gunships.

Though Israel has withdrawn from most of southern Lebanon, it is still occupying Shebaa farms, and there has been no tangible progress on the Syrian-Israeli track. The Syrian Golan is still occupied, and talks have not borne fruit yet due to Israel's prevarications and claims that Lake Tiberias is a security requirement for Israel, as if security and water were Israeli needs only, not those of the rest of the people of the region.

While the Arabs have opted for peace as a strategic option, they have not opted for capitulation. They have demanded, and are still demanding, the application of international legitimacy, including, above all, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), based on the principle of the exchange of land for a just and comprehensive peace, which requires complete withdrawal from all the Arab territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, the return of Palestinian refugees to their homeland, the restoration of their rights, and compensation for those who do not wish to return.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has always aspired to a just and comprehensive peace and to security and stability in the region. It has supported the peace talks since their inception and participated in the Madrid Conference and in multilateral talks. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which, together with the international community, has followed the horrible massacres to which the Palestinians have been subjected and the flagrant violations of the rights of Arab inhabitants of Palestine, condemns Israel's continued wanton attacks against Palestinians in East Jerusalem and throughout the occupied Palestinian territories.

We would like to reaffirm the Arab character of Jerusalem and the fact that East Jerusalem is part and parcel of the occupied Palestinian territories, to which international law is applicable, as it is to other occupied Arab territories, and that, as a Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, it should be the subject of peace talks, in accordance with Security Council 242 (1967).

We also condemn Israel's occupation of a part of southern Lebanon and of the Syrian Golan, and we reaffirm that a just peace will not be realized if there is not a full withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories in Palestine, southern Lebanon and the Syrian Golan.

Proceeding from its belief in the principle of security for all, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia attaches great importance to the elimination of weapons of mass destruction in the region. We have also supported efforts to declare the Middle East a nuclear-weapon-

free zone. We are deeply concerned at Israel's refusal to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and to subject its facilities to international monitoring and verification, which poses a grave threat to peace, security and stability in the region.

Once again I should like to reiterate that there can be no peace without justice. We seek a comprehensive and just peace — not just the cessation of violence and the prevalence of calm in the region. Israel is mistaken if it imagines that peace can be achieved at the expense of the legitimate rights of the Arabs in Palestine, Lebanon and Syria.

The conflict in the Middle East is a clear example of the link between peace and justice. Disregarding international legitimacy, injustice and usurping the rights of others will not enable Israel, despite its military might and sophisticated weaponry, to impose its own unjust peace.

Mr. Listre (Argentina) *(spoke in Spanish):* The peace process in the Middle East has entered a most delicate and sensitive stage. Since the end of September, violence has intensified in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and in Israel. Tensions have also increased at the Israel- Lebanon border.

The Argentine Republic has noted these developments with great concern and regret, as they threaten to jeopardize the progress achieved since the 1991 Madrid Conference, at which the parties decided to take the path of diplomatic negotiations to resolve their differences.

I should like to express the sincere condolences of the Government and people of Argentina to the families of the victims of the violence. The fact that so many women, children and elderly persons have died is a further demonstration of the irrational nature of the situation and the urgent need to put an end to it.

In October, under the auspices of President Clinton of the United States and President Mubarak of Egypt, Prime Minister Barak and President Arafat met at Sharm el-Sheikh and agreed on a series of measures to put an end to the violence, establish mechanisms of inquiry and resume the peace talks.

Some of the measures provided by Sharm el-Sheikh have already begun to be implemented. In that respect, we note the establishment of the fact-finding committee, which is headed by Senator Mitchell of the United States and in which other prominent international figures are taking part. We hope that this committee will begin its work soon and will contribute to the restoration of calm. We believe also that cooperation between the Israeli and Palestinian security forces must continue and be strengthened.

While these initiatives can have a positive impact in the short term, the ultimate objective has to be the resumption of the peace negotiations. Peace is the only strategic option for the countries of the Middle East. The logic of confrontation and mutual rejection between Israel and its Arab neighbours will lead nowhere.

I wish to reiterate our belief that peace in the Middle East must be achieved on the basis of the comprehensive implementation, in good faith, of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973); the principles adopted at the Madrid Conference; the Oslo agreements; and other existing agreements between the parties.

In the quest for a definitive solution to the conflict, efforts must be made to reconcile the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians to material independence and personal dignity, and Israel's legitimate right to recognition and security.

I wish to reiterate Argentina's support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and their self-determination, including their right to establish an independent state. I reiterate also that Israel has the right to live within secure and internationally recognized borders, at peace with its neighbours.

For that reason, my country firmly condemns all acts of violence and rejects as inadmissible the use of terrorist means.

At the same time, we believe that the confiscation and destruction of Palestinian property and the construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, which contravene international law and United Nations resolutions, must cease.

There will be no comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, as sought by the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, if all the tracks of the peace process are not pursued simultaneously. We therefore welcome Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon in compliance with resolution 425 (1978). We believe that, in current circumstances, all parties must act with the great

caution and self-control and refrain from undertaking or tolerating acts of provocation that could increase tension on the border.

We note with concern the lack of dialogue between the Syrian Arab Republic and Israel on the Golan Heights and urge the parties to renew it in a frank and constructive spirit, taking into account the principle of land for peace and the need to comply fully with resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Bilateral negotiations are the motor force of the peace process and solutions to all pending questions will be achieved through them. We must recall, however, that the United Nations has a special historic responsibility towards Palestine that has been preserved and consolidated over the past half-century. The ongoing assistance for Palestinian refugees and the personal commitment of successive Secretaries-General to peace are clear signs of that.

The Argentine Republic firmly supports all of Secretary-General Kofi Annan's efforts to persuade the parties to halt the violence and return to the negotiating table. Furthermore, my country recognizes the efforts made by the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, who has worked tirelessly over the past year to that very end.

Mr. Sharma (India): The peace process that began in Madrid in 1991 infused new life into the efforts to end the Arab-Israel conflict, an issue which has been of high priority to the international community for decades. The Madrid peace process was envisaged as a process of direct negotiations proceeding along two tracks, one between Israel and the Arab States, the other between Israel and the Palestinians. Negotiations were to be conducted on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and the principle of land for peace. The decision of the Arab countries, in particular Syria and Lebanon, to participate in the Middle East peace process was a courageous step which we welcomed and supported.

The Lebanese track has shown considerable progress this year following the withdrawal of Israel from Lebanese territory and the deployment of peacekeepers of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) along the border between Lebanon and Israel. We welcome this development as a step in the direction of realizing lasting peace and tranquillity in the region. From the reports of the Secretary-General, it appears that the situation is generally peaceful and calm. In view of our deep, abiding and historical links with this region, we have contributed a battalion and supporting staff to UNIFIL.

Early this year, there were reasons to believe that the stalemate on the Syrian track would also be broken. While this did not happen, there was hope that progress could be achieved. The recent developments in the occupied territories have vitiated and charged the atmosphere. We hope that, in these trying moments, both Syria and Israel will continue to strive hard to find a solution, which would indeed have a positive impact on the overall situation in the Middle East, particularly in Palestine. We remain committed to the unconditional and full implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) at the earliest possible moment and the extension of the authority of Syria over its entire territory.

The Middle East region, a cradle of human civilization, is of importance and concern to the entire international community. Today, we are discussing the situation in the region in an atmosphere far different from that of just a few months ago, when the leaders of Palestine and Israel were striving hard to negotiate a solution. These recent setbacks, a challenge to the sagacity and statesmanship of the leaders of Palestine and Israel, have to be put aside and Palestine and Israel have to work together for their common future. This year, the first of the new millennium, which all of us began with hope and the promise of leaving behind the shadows of the past, has to end on a happy note. The progress achieved on the Lebanese track should serve as an example of what it is possible to achieve with dialogue, goodwill and determination. The path to peace is not easy, but it is the only path. There is no other option and no other choice.

Mr. Wehbe (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): This meeting of the General Assembly is being held to discuss the two points on the agenda concerning the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine. The situation is complex and threatening and tensions are on the rise. The blood of the martyred and the wounded continues to flow abundantly as a result of Israel's continuous acts of aggression and escalation of violence, which threaten the very survival of the Palestinian people and its right to live in dignity and security on its ancestral land.

It has been 10 years since the peace process began. The Israeli occupation of Arab territories that began in 1967 is ongoing. Settlements are still being established and expanded by settlers brought in from all over the world. Jerusalem is occupied. The refugees are prevented from returning to their homes and lands and brutal aggression is being unleashed to destroy the Palestinian people. The peace process has reached a deadlock.

Are not all these Israeli practices part of a premeditated plan carried out by the Israeli Government to waste time? Is this not the same policy presented by former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir when he declared that he wanted to continue to negotiate with the Arabs only for the sake of negotiating, — for 10 years if need be — so long as he was in power?

Given the dangerous escalation of the situation in the region, we must clarify the following points. First, halting the peace process, the number of Palestinian martyrs killed by the Israeli occupying forces in cold blood — more than 300 killed and more than 10,000 wounded, one third of whom are children — and the acts of destruction are but a link in a chain of State terrorism conducted by Israel. Do they not prove that Israel is the sole party responsible for aborting the peace process?

Secondly, the parade of wounded and dead in the occupied territories, must move the international community into condemning the Israeli occupation and the practices of the Israeli Government. The international community must adopt all practical measures to put an end to Israeli aggression and to the massacres perpetrated against unarmed Palestinians. This can be achieved, inter alia, through the establishment of an international criminal court to prosecute Israeli war criminals guilty of massacring Palestinians and Arabs in the occupied territories. The Arab summit requested the establishment of such a court at its recent meeting in Cairo.

Thirdly, the bloody events in the Palestinian occupied territories, including Jerusalem, clearly show that the Israeli leaders are competing to ensure electoral votes — gained by the blood of Palestinians and the massacring of Palestinian children. The two competing Israeli parties are each trying to prove that it is capable of ensuring greater victories for Israel by adopting even more extremist positions than the other. This represents a race towards extremism to gain a greater number of extremist Israeli votes — particularly in the framework of having early elections for the post of Prime Minister and for seats in the Israeli parliament. This also would allow for the establishment of an emergency Government, which the Israeli parties have even termed a "war cabinet".

Fourthly, many political statements have asked the Israeli and Palestinian sides to exercise restraint and to put an end to violence. The President of the Syrian Arab Republic, Mr. Bashar Al-Assad, intervened at the Arab summit in Cairo and declared:

> "What are these parties that are invited to practise restraint? The term 'parties' means that they are similar parties with comparable characteristics.
>
> "The Israeli side has a State, while the Palestinian side has not until now been able to establish a State. The first side enjoys sovereignty, while the second side does not. The first side has a big army, with the most modern of weapons, particularly nuclear weapons, while the second side has only stones. The first side is the killer, whereas the second is the killed. How can you call them 'parties' or 'sides'? How can you demand restraint from them on an equal footing?"

Fifthly, the wave of anger that is unfolding in the Arab countries and the Islamic world and raging in the hearts of those who love peace and freedom and who defend human rights shows that it is urgent for the international community to put an immediate end to the Israeli excesses and to the disdain shown by Israel for human rights and human values, social and legal systems and morality and principles. The world must intervene firmly and clearly for peace so that the peace process can be resumed and lead to an overall just peace in the region, ensuring dignity and justice for all.

Sixth, Israel is trying to impose through force what it could not obtain through negotiation. We wonder if the Israeli leaders think that they will be able to force the Arabs, and the Palestinian people in particular, to capitulate. The clear answer is that they will not be able to. Israel must understand the historical lessons of the struggle of people against occupation. Examples provided by the Arab people in Palestine, in Lebanon and in Syria should be enough to convince Israel of the need to return to the path of peace and not of war. These examples should suffice to convince Israel that the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Al-Quds Al-Sharif and

Palestine are part and parcel of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and that is why we have demanded a just, comprehensive and lasting peace. In that respect, we reiterate that resistance in order to free occupied territories must not be defined as a national struggle in a certain region and terrorism in another, especially as resistance against foreign occupation is a right guaranteed by the United Nations Charter and by international resolutions.

Seventh, Israel has continued to occupy the Syrian Golan since 1967. Israeli leaders continue to threaten Syria and Lebanon, thus exporting their domestic problems abroad to fuel their electoral campaigns. Once more, these electoral campaigns are fueled by ranting against Syria and Lebanon.

We wish to reaffirm from this rostrum that Israeli threats have never frightened Syria or Lebanon, nor will they unsettle Syria or Lebanon. Our determination will not be shaken. These threats do not serve peace in the region, but exacerbate tension, increase violence and fuel hotbeds of tension, causing new cycles of violence that Israel uses as obstacles to peace.

The leaders of the Islamic world reaffirmed at the Doha Summit, along with the leaders of the Arab world at the Arab League Summit in Cairo, that a just and comprehensive peace in the region requires first of all the complete withdrawal of Israel from all Palestinian occupied territories, including Jerusalem, from the occupied Syrian Golan up to the line of 4 June 1967 and withdrawal from Lebanese territories that are still occupied, including the agricultural farms of Shebaa, to the internationally recognized border, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). A just, comprehensive peace also depends on the principle of land for peace and, finally, on the exercise by the Palestinian people of its legitimate national rights, including its right to return to its homeland, to recover its property and to establish an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital.

The leaders of the Islamic and Arab world have reaffirmed their solidarity with Syria and Lebanon and have condemned and rejected Israeli threats against these countries. They also declared that any failure to respect the peace process or attempts to circumvent it are unacceptable.

Syria is sincerely and seriously committed to a comprehensive and just peace. Our position is clear. Its rights are recognized by the international community and by international resolutions. It is up to Israel to demonstrate its political will, to work sincerely and seriously like us to help the people of the Middle East and the region avoid the scourge of war and destruction. It is up to the other party to ensure peace, security, stability and dignity for all.

Liberating our occupied territories is our main concern, and we will not waver. It is only natural that people reject occupation. We declare to the whole world that while we are committed to achieving a just, comprehensive peace, we are even more determined not to yield a single inch of the occupied Syrian Golan or the occupied Arab territories.

We are working for peace while Israel is working for war. That is a fact. This is precisely what Israel is doing against the Palestinian people. We have made peace a strategic option. That was reaffirmed at the Cairo Summit. Israel, however, has made peace a tactical, cosmetic choice. Arabs want a comprehensive peace, but Israel wants a partial and incomplete peace. The peace process has stalled due to Israel's intransigence and extremism.

We thus invite the international community — in particular those countries that can exercise some influence on Israel, including the United States, Russia and the European Union and peace-loving countries in the world — to act effectively and pressure Israel to respect international resolutions: the resolutions of our Organization.

We ask the United Nations not to pursue a policy of double standards when it defends the Charter and the principles of international law. We invite it to adopt more firm measures to make Israel respect international law and international instruments, as well as to implement United Nations resolutions in a non-selective manner.

With that in mind, together with our co-sponsors, we present draft resolution A/55/L.50 on the Syrian Golan to the General Assembly. The draft resolution is submitted to the Assembly at every session. Its provisions are in accordance with the Charter, international law and international humanitarian law and require us to work against occupation and for a comprehensive, just peace in accordance with the Charter.

Mr. Abelian (Armenia): The Arab-Israeli conflict is probably the most complex international problem

inherited by the twenty-first century. Without a comprehensive and just resolution of this conflict there will be no peace and economic prosperity in the Middle East, and without peace in the Middle East there is little hope for peace and stability in today's shrinking world. The peaceful resolution of this conflict will have a positive psychological effect of enormous scale, capable of provoking a chain reaction of peace throughout the conflict areas of the world.

During the last nine years, the peace process initiated by the Madrid and Oslo accords has witnessed successes and failures, bringing both hope and frustration. The Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon provided an opportunity for progress on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks. Regrettably, this opportunity has not been used in its full capacity. Progress on these two tracks remains an essential element of the comprehensive settlement, and there is no positive alternative to the resumption of direct negotiations between Israel, Syria and Lebanon.

The agreements reached at Camp David through the active mediation of the United States could be considered proof of the irreversibility of the peace dialogue. Unfortunately, the recent burst of violence forces us to speak today more of the fragility and vulnerability of the peace process. This fragility has its symbol, and that is the question of Jerusalem.

When the Israeli and Palestinian leaders agreed to discuss this issue in the final stage of their negotiations, this was regarded as a sign of political courage and proof of commitment to a comprehensive and peaceful solution. It is well known that Jerusalem has been the axis of Jewish spiritual life for three millennia. It is also known that the Palestinian national identity is concentrated in Jerusalem. So both sides agreed to discuss an extremely sensitive and delicate issue, overcoming enormous internal resistance in both camps which seemed not to leave any room for flexibility or concessions.

There were fears that the issue of the status of Jerusalem would eventually ignite the situation and nullify all previous agreements. The situation today is indeed too dangerously close to the line beyond which these pessimistic visions may come true. We deeply mourn the tragic loss of lives on both sides; there can be no justification or excuse for these meaningless deaths. The Armenian Government is particularly worried by the increasing involvement of children in the acts of violence, which has already resulted in an unprecedented high number of killings and injuries. We call upon both sides to take all measures necessary to keep children away from areas of violence and to protect them from the horrors of warfare. We are hopeful that political courage, wisdom and good will, which were repeatedly demonstrated during the past decade by both sides, will help them overcome the ongoing crisis.

Today, as never before, the Middle East needs the international community's support. In this respect, we would like to commend the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his tireless efforts to mediate the termination of hostilities and violence and to get the peace process back on track. The United Nations bears unique responsibility for peace in the Middle East, and the activities of the Secretary-General clearly indicate that this responsibility is not neglected or underestimated. We also welcome the return of the Russian Federation to the active and effective co-sponsorship of the peace process. We believe that active Russian mediation will contribute to the early resumption of negotiations and to the revival of the peace process.

For the Armenian people the situation in the Middle East is not just another news headline. Armenians have lived in the Holy Land since the reign of Herod the Great of Judea. Following the adoption of Christianity as the State religion of Armenia in 301, the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem was established to serve the religious and national needs of the vast number of Armenian pilgrims, who have formed a very large local Armenian community. This community has continually existed in the Holy Land from the fifth century A.D. and is concentrated in the Armenian Quarter, one of the four historical Quarters of the Old City of Jerusalem. The Patriarchate is the oldest Armenian institution outside Armenia, and the Armenians of Jerusalem form the oldest living community in the Armenian Diaspora.

Armenian religious and cultural life has been flourishing in Jerusalem for centuries. The Patriarchate's treasures include a renowned seminary and a library encompassing the second largest collection of Armenian manuscripts in the world and a museum full of priceless national relics. Armenian mosaics and inscriptions throughout the Old City, including the oldest surviving inscription made in Armenian script, on the mosaic floor of the Church of

the Holy Sepulchre, bear testimony to the continued Armenian presence in and around Jerusalem since the fifth century.

It is also for these reasons that we follow very closely and with great concern the situation in the area of conflict and remain vitally interested in peace and stability in this part of the world.

The Christian dimension of the question of Palestine as a whole — and Jerusalem in particular, being primarily a religious issue — has also recently appeared within the political framework.

We find it appropriate to refer here to the current status of the Christian Churches in the Holy Land, known as the "Status Quo of 1852", which guarantees their rights and privileges and also reflects the consensus within the major Christian denominations on the issue of their presence and cooperative functioning in the Holy Land. According to the Status Quo, the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic Churches, through their patriarchates in Jerusalem, share equal custodial responsibilities over the Christian holy sites. The Status Quo and its provisions were recognized and respected by the Paris Peace Conference of 1856, the Congress of Berlin of 1878 and the Treaty of Versailles of 1919, as well as by successive administrations in the Holy Land, including Ottoman, British, Jordanian and Israeli authorities. We welcome the fact that the leaders of these three Churches have been regularly contacted by the high-ranking officials from both sides and briefed about the results of their negotiations. We hope that this practice will be continued in the future.

Although the Christian leaders of Jerusalem and the Churches they represent are not part of the dispute nor the negotiations, taking into account their views and legitimate concerns will make the final outcome of the negotiations more comprehensive and acceptable to all concerned parties and will reaffirm the significance of the Holy City to the whole international community.

The future status of the Armenian Quarter was one of the issues in the recent deliberations about the future of Jerusalem, with both sides wishing to see the Quarter under their sovereignty. Without expressing any preferences to either side, we find it necessary to recall that the Armenian and the Christian Quarters of the Old City of Jerusalem are contiguous and inseparable entities, firmly united by religion and history. Together they form what is known as Christian Jerusalem, the spiritual homeland and focus of aspirations of billions of believers worldwide. A forced separation of these two Quarters from each other would endanger the provisions of the Status Quo, adding to the complexity of the situation.

It is our hope that there is still a chance to resolve the Jerusalem dilemma without divisions or partitions. As the international community celebrates the advent of the third millennium through the Bethlehem 2000 project, with the hope that this will be a millennium of peace and good will, it seems unacceptable to erect new dividing walls or to draw new coloured lines just 10 kilometres north of Bethlehem. Mankind should be determined to leave the symbols of this kind behind.

In conclusion, I would also like to use this opportunity to pay tribute to the memory of Leah Rabin, who, like her husband, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, was a devoted and dedicated warrior of peace.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item for this meeting. We shall hear the remaining speakers on Friday, 1 December 2000, at 10 a.m. Our first three speakers in the morning session are the Russian Federation, Israel and Turkey.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.